

Message Text

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16

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2548

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E.O.: 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, TS

SUBJ: RAILWAY WORKERS THREATEN STRIKE

1. UNION AT THE TUNISIAN NATIONAL RAILWAY COMPANY (SNCFT) STAGED MARCH IN DOWNTOWN TUNIS APRIL 26 ON HEADQUARTERS OF RAILWAY COMPANY TO PROTEST LACK OF MOVEMENT IN NEGOTIATIONS ON CHANGES IN WORK RULES AND SALARIES. ACCORDING TO ACCOUNT OF MARCH PUBLISHED IN SEMI-INDEPENDENT "LE TEMPS", UNION HAD VOTED TO GO ON STRIKE MAY 6 IF NO AGREEMENT REACHED BY THAT DATE. GENERAL UNION OF TUNISIAN WORKERS (UGTT) SOURCE TOLD US THAT BRIEF, WILDCAT STRIKE ACTION HAD ALREADY BEEN INITIATED IN TUNIS AND SFAX, THE MOST IMPORTANT CENTERS OF ACTIVITY OF SNCFT. ACCORDING TO PRESS, TRAINS IN TUNIS WERE DELAYED TWO HOURS.

2. UGTT ARABIC LANGUAGE WEEKLY "ECH-CHAAB" REPORTED ON APRIL 24 THAT A RAILWAY WORKERS STRIKE WAS IMMINENT BECAUSE SNCFT ADMINISTRATION REFUSED TO NEGOTIATE WITH UNION ON BASIC ISSUES CONCERNING WORKERS. UNION HAS DEMANDED A FORTY-HOUR WEEK IN PLACE OF PRESENT 48 HOURS, GENERAL REVISION OF THE COMPANY WORK RULES, A REVISION OF THE INCENTIVE BONUS, AND AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE GENERAL SALARY SCALES. IN REFUSING TO AGREE TO UNION DEMANDS, THE COMPANY OFFICIALS HAVE NOTED, AMONG OTHER POINTS, THAT A 40-HOUR WORK WEEK WOULD REQUIRE ON-THIRD INCREASE IN TOTAL NUMBER OF SNCFT EMPLOYEES.

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3. COMMENT: IF A FULL-SCALE STRIKE IS MOUNTED AT THE SNCFT,

WITH WELL OVER 7,000 EMPLOYEES, IT WOULD HAVE A SERIOUS IMPACT
ON TUNISIAN ECONOMY AND WOULD CREATE TENSION BETWEEN GOVERN-
MENT AND TRADE UNION MOVEMENT. UGTT LEADER HABIB ACHOUR HAS NOT
BEEN UNDER PRESSURE IN RECENT MONTHS OVER STRIKE SITUATION BUT
A SNCFT STRIKE WOULD PUT HIM ON FIRING LINE AND REOPEN ISSUE
OF HIS STEWARDSHIP OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT.
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